EAST
MARTELLO GALLERY
and
MUSEUM

South Roosevelt Boulevard

Key West,

Florida

Open 9:00 A. M. till 5:00 P. M.

East Martello Tower

This Fortress, built in 1861, is one of four, authorized by the United States Congress in the year 1844 to be constructed in the Key West area, to combat any enemy landing forces which might attack Fort Taylor from the rear.

The construction of Fort Taylor at the entrance to Key West Harbor was begun in 1845 but the actual construction of the East and West Martello Towers was not undertaken until 1861 by the Union Forces in control of the Key West area during the War Between the States.

A narrow gauge railroad was built and utilized in this construction. The masons were brought from the North, as were the large blocks of slate forming the floors and granite for reinforcement. The bricks were made in Pensacola, Florida.

The two towers were identical in plan. Neither was completed as this type of fortification became obsolete during the War Between the States when rifled cannon with exploding shell came into general use. Fort Pulaski, a masonry fort on an island in the Savannah River, was quickly reduced in 1861 by a Union naval force under Commodore duPont. Key West was never subjected to naval attack.

Armament for the forts was to have consisted of 10-inch Rodman smooth bore guns in the first tier of casemate batteries with 8-inch Columbiads on the second tier. Four rifled Parrit guns were to have been mounted on the central tower where the mounts may still be seen. Small flank defense howitzers were to have been mounted in the interior casemates to fire on an enemy who may have broken through the outer works.

Maj. Louise V. White
Curator

The term MARTELLO TOWERS has long been used to designate masonry forts built chiefly on sea-coasts generally with thick walls and entrances high off the ground. The name MARTELLO may have come from a corruption of Martella Point on the island of Corsica where a fort of this type successfully resisted an invasion attempt by British naval forces in 1541; or it may have been taken from the name of a Spanish military engineer who is said to have designed the first fort of this kind.

The present entrance at East Martello Tower was built in 1954 when the Florida National Bank at Key West presented the old doors, but originally the only access to the fort was to have been over the rampart and across a drawbridge, entering the citadel at the second floor level. Inside were ammunition and provision storage vaults, water cistern, fireplace and other facilities for withstanding a siege.

The War Department retained possession of the property and made various uses of it during the Spanish-American War and World Wars One and Two. The Navy erected two search-light elevators on the ramparts of the East Tower and maintained a signal tower for aircraft atop the citadel during the second World War.

In 1951 the War Department granted the Key West Art and Historical Society a revocable permit to use the structure as an Art Gallery and Local History Museum and in 1956 the property was relinquished to Monroe County. Progress has been made in restoration and a tropical garden is being developed.

This once stern and forbidding barrier to would-be invaders of the Island has the affections of all Key Westers.

East Martello Tower houses the East Martello Gallery and Museum, a component of the Key West Art and Historical Society.

Mrs. Morgan Dennis
Receptionist